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ABSTRACT

Findings from a study that explored differences in the definition and operationalization of leadership between mainstream and disadvantaged groups are presented in this paper. The "fuzzy concept operationalization method" was used to define leadership traits in two groups of leaders participating in two different leadership training workshops: 12 black community leaders and 9 white educational administrators. Findings indicate that the white group used abstract terms to define leadership, while black respondents described leadership in more concrete forms. White and black leaders stressed motivation and resourcefulness, respectively. Both groups expressed agreement on such traits as communication, trustworthiness, concern, and decisiveness. A conclusion is that the definition of leadership should include personal traits, environmental and situational variables, and behavioral features. Findings account for changes in leadership ratings that may occur when standardized leadership inventories are applied to different cultural groups. The appendix contains ratings of leadership traits by key words. (12 references) (LMI)

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Operationalization of leadership by black and white leaders: Implications for validity.

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When Mahatma Gandhi led a fervent crowd of Indians to the sea to make salt, it was said that leadership existed in the Mahatma. When Martin Luther King accompanied a group of Americans on a march to the nation's capitol, newspapers spoke of Kings' leadership in the war on poverty and against discrimination. Even more recently, George Bush proclaimed himself among the "leaders" in education. Making salt, marching, proclaiming: are these the attributes of leadership so long sought in education, or are these and other behaviors just part of a complex syndrome of activity found in leaders? How do we really know when leadership exists ?

Studies of educational leadership rely upon the validity of current variable definitions for the traits of leaders. The validity of such studies is threatened if the perception of leadership traits varies greatly in various educational leaders. For example, ethnic groups may define leadership differently, since leaders from minority and majority cultures vie for social influence through distinct political routes.

A long history of administrative research has been conducted in efforts to identify and rationalize leadership behaviors into measurable objectives for variable operationalization in studies of leadership. This work has also been used in developing assessment instruments for identifying potential educational leaders (See Mitchell, 1988 and Mazzarella and Grundy, 1989 for reviews).

The result of all this work has been the development of at least five different approaches to leadership definition. These are the trait approach, situational definition, behavioral definition, effectiveness relationship and, more recently, environmental variation (Mitchell, 1988). Despite these efforts, Mitchell (1988) concluded that no consensus had yet been reached on a central definition of leadership.

Mazzarella and Grundy (1989) concluded their review of the literature on leadership definition by suggesting that:

> "Leadership seems to be a gestalt phenomenon, greater than the sum of its behavioral parts" p. 26

The factors they identified as consistently emerging from studies of leadership consisted of: 1. above average intelligence; 2. above average socioeconomic background; 3. not being firstborn in a family; and 4. being allowed to make self-guiding decisions early in childhood development.

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Other reviews of leadership definition studies caution that so many paradoxical definitions now exist that any one measurement of the variable is threatened by contextual and personal covariation which confounds interpretation of leadership ratings (Carraway, 1990). Others have characterized the inherent bias springing from simultaneously rating leadership from personal, contextual and group behavioral perspectives (Offer and Strozier, 1985).

Despite these cautions, efforts continue to characterize leadership with several succinct characteristics. Offer and Strozier (1985) concluded that leadership definitions converged on the features of awareness, charisma, and ambition. Carraway (1990) suggested that today's leaders were more transformational and people-oriented, influencing, motivating, evaluating and visionary.

Perhaps, much of the difficulty in defining a measurable definition for leadership emerges from the dichotomy between leadership training and practice. Bennis (1989) suggested that the gap between practice and training was so large that leadership in action was more akin to a developing process of organizational and personal maturation than an achieved set of learned behavioral traits. Bennis' experience in leadership led him to conclude that vision, passion, enthusiasm, integrity, curiosity and daring were most characteristic of leadership in practice.

Given the history of failed attempts to converge on a measurable definition of leadership, researchers are left to adopt one of the five approaches cited in Mitchell (1988), develop a combined approach of some kind, or identify yet more new components of leadership. It is probably safe to say that we know something about leadership, but are not exactly sure what it is we know.

It is certainly some set of identifiable traits, along the lines of research sprung from the early work of Halpin and Winer (1957), in concert with Stogdill and Coons' development of leadership behavior surveys. It is also certainly some set of interpersonal psychological constructs which allow individuals to effectively interact with organizations (See Cassel, 1975 for a review). It now also encompasses environmental contextual characteristics and the behaviors of other people in group processes since researchers have found variation in leadership ratings under experimentally-induced changes in these conditions (see Welch, 1983 and Orban, 1978 for examples).

Efforts, then, to develop new leadership measuring instruments must necessarily account for a wide variety of potential covarying phenomena if they hope to empirically derive estimates of leadership. One recent attempt along these lines is documented in Moss, Johansen and Preskill (1991) who developed a leadership attribute inventory (LAI) for use in vocational education administration programs.

The present study emerged from our concern to account for changes in leadership ratings which might emerge when instruments like the LAI are applied in cultural groups different from mainstream ethnic majorities. With renewed interest in developing leadership among culturally disadvantaged groups (Center for Volunteer Development, 1990), it seems appropriate to examine how leadership is operationalized in the opinions of mainstream and disadvantaged groups.

Methodology

This study applied the fuzzy concept operationalization method, developed originally by Coffing, Hutchinson, Thomann and Allan (1971) to a definition of leadership traits in a group of 12 black community leaders attending a leadership training workshop and in a group of nine white leaders attending a summer educational administration training seminar. Each group of leaders responded to a set of vignettes and wrote a set of leadership traits individually and in small groups. A master trait list was compiled by each set of leaders through consensus.

The frequency of occurrence of listed traits (phrase usage) was used to rank order characteristics drawn from both groups. A signed rank test was computed to test if the ranked priorities of both groups were similar. The frequency of occurrence of phrases describing listed traits was tested for association with the black and white leaders using a Chi-square statistic.

Results

Leaders in the present study listed 45 distinct traits of leadership (See Appendix one) with 25 different and 20 similar descriptors. Descriptors were aggregated into 13 thematic areas with accompanying frequencies of occurrence listed in Table One. These total to more than n=12 or 9 since keywords were transposed and repeated in similar context more than once in some respondent text.

Table One. Summary Themes of Leadership

Theme: Characteristics of Leadership.	African-American leaders n=12	Caucasian-American leaders n=9
A. Appearance of being a leader	3	1
B. Communication abilities	6	10
C. Planning-organizing-implementing and evaluating	13	32

D. Responsibility	13	7
E. Democratic manager	11	8
F. Trustworthy	8	6
G. Resourceful	10	0
H. Concerned about other people	16	15
I. Decisive	18	23
J. Self confident	5	7
K. Knowledgeable	1	6
L. Visionary	2	1
M. Motivated	0	4

A Chi-square test of association between the descriptors in Table One and African-American and Caucasian-American leaders suggests a dependence between descriptor frequency of occurrence and leader group (Chi-square(12)=30.713, $p< 0.0022$). However, the two groups did not appear to significantly rank the descriptors differently (rank sign sum=14.5, $p>.095$).

Keywords unique to African-American leaders were "Communicates, able to communicate, accountable, trustworthy, resourceful, observes, unselfish, crisis-manager and self-confident". The theme appearing to be unique to this group was Resourcefulness. Perhaps minority leaders view the ability to make do with whatever is at hand as a leadership community asset.

The entire group of African-American leaders agreed as a whole to these definitions of leadership: ability-to-communicate; organize-plan-implement-evaluate; decision-making-and-direction; sticking-to-plan; ability-to-delegate-authority; appearance-of-being-leader; willingness-eagerness-to-be-a-leader; acceptance-of-responsibility-under-pressure; good mental reflexes; coolheaded-and-flexible; give-directions; assessing-capabilities-of-group; accountability; analyze. It seemed to us that this group tended to exemplify leadership in very concrete forms.

Keywords unique to Caucasian-American leaders were "Communicator, Planner, Listening skills, motivated, stress-tolerant, controlled, problem solver, awareness, persuader, sensitive, experienced, credible, good judgment, time manager, consensus-seeker and priority setter". The unique theme of this group was Motivation. Perhaps majority leaders, being in a more comfortable social position, find it more important to motivate leadership action.

The entire group of Caucasian-American leaders agreed as a whole to these definitions of leadership: problem-analysis; decision-maker; stress tolerant; organizational skills; delegates; communicator; time-manager; decisive; committed; knowledgeable; participatory-manager; risk-taker; flexible; judgement; planner; visionary; assertive; credible; sensitive; persuasive; responsible; self-controlled; motivator; empathetic. This group seemed more abstract in defining leadership and used a much wider set of contexts to relate leadership characterisitics.

These results suggest that mainstream and disadvantaged leaders can agree to some primary and recurring themes in leadership definition like communication, trustworthiness, concern and decisiveness. They can also disagree on the importance of features like resourcefulness, motivation, responsibility, and the managerial functions of planning and organizing.

Clearly, the research on leadership definition shows that it behooves students of leadership to measure personal traits, environmental variables, situation traits, behavioral features and differential group behaviors before claiming valid results from studies. There does appear to exist some consensus on a few identified and measurable traits of leadership, as well as a considerable degree of disagreement with others poorly identified and less easily measured. It seems that we have some distance to go in properly evaluating leadership and must await further clarification of this concept before drawing strong conclusions from studies.

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Appendix One . Ratings of Leadership Traits by Keywords

Keyword	African-American Leaders n=12	Caucasian-American Leaders n=9
	Number (proportion)	Number (proportion)
Appearance (A)	3(.028)	1(.008)
Communication skills (B)	1(.009)	3(.025)
Communicates (B)	4(.037)	0
Communicator (B)	0	3(.025)
Able to communicate (B)	2(.019)	0
Assesses (C)	4(.037)	3(.025)
Responsible (D)	5(.047)	2(.017)
Participatory (E)	1(.009)	2(.017)
Goal-setter (C)	1(.009)	2(.017)
Accountable (D)	6(.056)	0
Trustworthy (F)	8(.075)	0
Resourceful (G)	10(.093)	0
Concerned with others (H)	11(.103)	2(.017)
Risk-Taker (I)	7(.065)	7(.058)
Plans-organizes-implements-evaluates (C)	2(.019)	0
Planner (C)	0	3(.025)

Organized (C)	1(.009)	6(.050)
Observes (H)	2(.019)	0
Delegates authority and responsibility (E)	5(.047)	2(.017)
Flexible (E)	5(.047)	2(.017)
Unselfish/self less (H)	3(.028)	0
Decision-maker (I)	8(.075)	2(.017)
Decisive (I)	1(.009)	8(.067)
Analytical (C)	5(.047)	5(.042)
Takes charge/control /action (D)	1(.009)	4(.033)
Crisis manager (I)	2(.019)	0
Assertive (J)	3(.028)	7(.058)
Self-confident (J)	2(.019)	0
Knowledgeable (K)	1(.009)	6(.050)
Visionary (L)	2(.019)	1(.008)
Committed (D)	1(.009)	1(.008)
Listens with skill (B)	0	2(.017)
Motivated (M)	0	4(.033)
Tolerates stress (I)	0	4(.033)
Controlled (I)	0	2(.017)
Problem solver (C)	0	6(.050)
Aware (H)	0	2(.017)
Persuader (B)	0	2(.017)
Sensitive (H)	0	5(.042)

Experienced (F)	0	3(.025)
Credible (F)	0	3(.025)
Good Judge (H)	0	6(.050)
Time manager (C)	0	5(.042)
Consensus-seeking (E)	0	2(.017)
Priority setter (C)	0	2(.017)
Total Occurrences	106	120

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